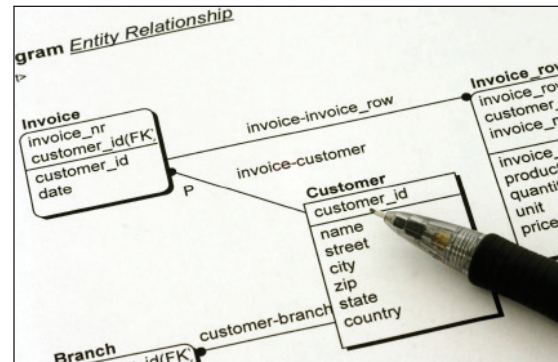


Leveraging Integrated Information Technology to Enhance the Customer Experience and Bottom Line

By Rajeev Tankha

The wireless world is buzzing with the proliferation of exciting new smartphones, tablets, and applications while next-generation network technology is completely changing what we can do with mobile devices. Consumers can watch movies, shop, and perform important work functions from their phone. Just as importantly, more and more consumers are bundling their services – combining cable, mobile, and fixed-line Internet onto one bill.

But as we continue to delve deeper into our new technological capabilities, it is easy for communications service providers (CSPs) to neglect some of the fundamental business aspects that lead to success in an increasingly competitive marketplace. A 2010 Oracle survey, titled “[Opportunity Calling: The Future of Mobile Communications](#)”, found that 85 percent of mobile users rated service reliability as the most important quality in their mobile service provider and 77 percent expressed a willingness to switch to another carrier for better pricing. This indicates that shiny new devices and cool features don’t mean much if reliability and price don’t meet the mark. Customer service is still vital to CSP competitiveness as optimal customer experience management will lead to lower



customer churn, minimal order fall out, and enhanced revenue.

Reducing Order-Cycle Times

Customer experience management in the wireless sphere goes well beyond taking calls and having customer service representatives answer questions. It encompasses the entire order to cash process, which is complex and includes a variety of potential technical complications. As such, order management is critical to a service provider, as the ability to accurately capture, execute, and process an order and properly bill a customer is the first impression a CSP generally makes on its customers.

The order-to-cash process starts the moment a potential customer considers purchasing one or more services from a CSP. In order to learn about the service provider’s offers and possible promotions, a potential customer is likely to log onto a CSP’s Web

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site, venture into a retail store, or call a customer service representative. But for many CSPs, trouble can already loom here. For instance, many service provider Web sites lack self-service capabilities, particularly for business or enterprise customers. Want to revise a service or add new people to a plan? Many times consumers will have to call a sales representative or go into a store. When it comes to the in-store experience, the average handling time for a new customer transaction can be as long as 42 minutes. Why is this? Because in-store sales representatives often must input customer data into as many as 10 systems. This is inefficient and can leave a negative impression on a consumer, even before they have activated a new service.

Once a customer orders a product, the customer experience is far from over. It is imperative the order is processed and fulfilled accurately, quickly, and cost effectively. But this step is far more difficult than one would think. Many CSPs using legacy order management systems will have customer information scattered across as many as three retail databases and five corporate databases. With scattered customer information, it is easy to miss important order fulfillment tasks.

For example, say a customer calls a service provider and purchases a triple-play bundle consisting of cable television, internet, and mobile phone service. The order is processed and the account representative schedules for the customer to have her triple-play bundle installed in five days. But then the rep may run into a problem due to a siloed legacy order management system, and not realize that internet bandwidth in the customer's area is unavailable for twelve days due to high demand. When a field

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service team comes to install the customer's triple-play bundle, the customer will undoubtedly be upset when the installation rep tells her she will have to wait another week before she can have broadband internet. Even worse, since customer data is segmented, service representatives may not realize that the customer did not receive her high speed internet, causing more customer agitation if she calls for an explanation. Or, the internet may not be turned on in a week due to another system erroneously saying the customer already received her internet.

So how can CSPs ensure a smooth order delivery process? The key is to integrate sales, billing, and fulfillment processes and systems. Instead of having an account rep input data in multiple systems, the rep should be able to enter it into one customer relationship management (CRM) system. By unifying customer and order management architectures, once the provider inputs the order into the CRM system, the information can be automatically transferred into the CSP's order and service management (OSM) system. This gives account reps, order managers, and configuration specialists a 360-degree view of the customer. In addition, fewer manual inputs and more automated functions will reduce the number of order fallouts, which can be costly and aggravate customers.



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Increasing Speed to Offer Introduction

The telecommunications industry is competitive and with virtually everyone owning a mobile phone, service providers must maximize average revenue per user (ARPU) to maintain a competitive edge. A central component to maximizing ARPU is to understand existing customers and provide new offers that are complementary to the services they already use. For instance, if a customer already has cable television and internet service through a CSP, the provider could offer a new bundled rate that includes mobile phone service.

And new services are evolving quickly. With rapid technological advances in the industry, we are continuing to see new applications and services that are optimized for next-generation networks. Customers inherently gravitate toward new services, and it is important for CSPs to deliver those services in a timely fashion. But with siloed billing, order management, and customer management systems, it can take three months to a year to introduce new services to the market. Such a delay could cause CSPs to lose customers who are unwilling to wait patiently for a new service, as they demand real-time, on-demand services that offer “instant gratification.”

To accelerate new offer introduction, service providers are turning toward a unified architecture that leverages central order management (COM). With the introduction of a unified COM capability, when a CSP creates a new offer it can automatically route order information through the COM layer to orchestrate this order across billing, shipping, provisioning, field service, and CRM environments. So, instead of waiting for months, a provider can offer a new service in a matter of days or weeks.

In addition, ensuring a service provider's business support system (BSS) is integrated with the CRM and COM architecture enables CSPs to enhance the customer experience with converged billing. While customers are purchasing an increasing number of services, they still expect to have all their services on one monthly bill. Integrating BSS and CRM systems eliminates localized fulfillment flows and ensures seamless system communication when customers sign up for new orders. This further reduces instances of order fallout and enables CSPs to consolidate all charges onto one monthly bill.

By establishing customer visibility and an ability to deliver new services to market quickly, CSPs maintain the capabilities to enhance ARPU. For instance, a sales representative can view a customer's order history and notice a customer could save money

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by bundling already utilized internet and cable services with a new VoIP phone service. The rep could then call the customer and proactively offer the opportunity to save the customer money while increasing customer satisfaction. Or, the service provider could text the customer a new value-added service for their mobile plan.

Reducing IT OPEX and Improving Customer Service

While service providers cannot replace call center representatives, integrated information technology solutions can provide reps with more comprehensive and up-to-date information about the customers with whom they are speaking. These solutions can also arm other areas of the service provider's business with data they need to bring new services to market and provision them more quickly and accurately. By leveraging an integrated offer design and order management architecture that unifies customer care, billing, and fulfillment systems, global service providers can minimize order fallout, which can cost as much as \$500,000-\$1 million per percentage point of incorrect orders [according to Yankee Group](#). In addition, service providers can leverage advanced offer design processes to introduce new products to market quickly, and leverage complete customer visibility to actively engage customers with new promotions – increasing average revenue per user.

Delivering exciting new services on next-generation networks is certainly important for service providers. But just as important is optimal customer management that presents a first-class experience for consumers from the time they walk in the store, to when they activate their new service, to when they pay their monthly bill. Shiny new devices and cool features only run surface deep in the hearts of consumers, particularly as technology changes so rapidly, but great customer service can stand as the foundation for a long-term relationship.